DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 999 CS 208 031

AUTHOR McCleary, William J.
TITLE Beyond Critical Thinking: Teaching Students to Use Their Knowledge in Academic Writing.
PUB DATE 13 Oct 83
NOTE 36p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northeast Regional Conference on English in the Two-Year College (18th, Atlantic City, NJ, October 13-15, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Content Area Writing; Critical Thinking; *Deduction; *Expository Writing; Higher Education; Logical Thinking; *Persuasive Discourse; Prewriting; *Teaching Methods; Two Year Colleges; *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Case Histories

ABSTRACT

The case approach to academic writing requires a student to use subjects in an active way while writing. This approach, appropriate in content courses as well as in composition classes, improves a writer's logic more quickly and effectively than concentrating on logic alone. In the case approach, a student is given a body of information about a case and told to "interpret" the evidence on the basis of the contents of the textbook. Focusing on the "contents" of a deductive argument rather than the rules of deduction, the writer combines three basic kinds of content--evidence, rules of interpretation, and definitions--to create a sound deductive argument. When using this approach, teachers may wish to follow these procedures: (1) provide a specific outline; (2) introduce a heuristic procedure to help a student develop arguments; (3) present model essays to read and discuss; (4) provide opportunity for practice, in the form of ungraded essays; (5) spend a month on the unit to move from fictional to real cases; and (6) provide handouts and exercises. Additional considerations in using this method include the level of student knowledge, the difficulty and ambiguity of the process, and the difficulty of finding readable materials to show students that real people use deductive discourse in practical situations. (Sample cases, assignments, and an essay are included.) (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED237999

BEYOND CRITICAL THINKING: TEACHING STUDENTS TO USE THEIR KNOWLEDGE IN ACADEMIC WRITING

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
William J. McCleary
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

by

William J. McCleary
Genesee Community College

Paper delivered at the Northeast Regional Conference on English in the Two-Year College, October 13, 1983.

CS 208 031

BEYOND CRITICAL THINKING: TEACHING STUDENTS TO USE THEIR KNOWLEDGE IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Let me say right off what the subject of my talk is. I am going to be discussing the use of the case approach to academic writing. I do not mean by this the approach given in such books as Cases for Composition, The Little Writing Book, or Casebook Rhetoric. The approach these books take to cases is extremely valuable, and I use such books frequently. However, most of their cases do not, strictly speaking, involve academic writing. Instead, I am going to discuss a much narrower version of the case approach most clearly exemplified by the cases given as assignments in law schools. In this approach, like the usual case approach, students are given a body of information to work with. However, unlike the case approach as usually employed in English classes, a legal case assignment also gives students several legal principles to work with and requires a very narrow, logical, truly academic type of writing. The purpose is, as Professor Kingsfield always says, to take students with minds full of mush and make them think like lawyers.

My position is that any course can be approached in much the same way, with writing assignments very similar to legal cases. That is, we can take any course, be it sociology, hospitality management, anthropology, or whatever, and engage students in really thinking about the subject rather than just randomly absorbing a few concepts to regurgitate on some kind of exam. For example, where the usual student wants to sit there and passively absorb some sociology, the case approach requires the student to use sociology in an active way--to think like a sociologist, at least for

a short while. And since this method involves writing--indeed, requires writing--the composition teacher can make a powerful contribution to a student's academic development by working with cases in the writing class. In my talk today I will show you not only how this kind of case approach works but also how you can do it in your composition class and how you can help teachers of other subjects incorporate it into their own courses.

Before I get into that, however, let me briefly discuss some background information about the case approach.

One bit of background has to do with the title of my presentation, which begins with the phrase "Beyond Critical Thinking." As you know, critical thinking is a hot topic in colleges today, and as English teachers in colleges, we might want to join in this latest craze--or, more accurately, this revival of a perennial concern. Some of you may even be attending the conference on critical thinking to be held in Hartford next month. I think English teachers ought to participate, but you should be aware that we will have to go beyond critical thinking as it's usually defined. The basic problem with the standard version is that it's essentially passive. Look, for example, at the list of critical thinking skills drawn up by Robert H. Ennis, who will be one of the principal speakers at the Hartford conference:

1. Grasping the meaning of a statement.
2. Judging whether there is ambiguity in a line of reasoning.
3. Judging whether certain statements contradict each other.
4. Judging whether a conclusion follows necessarily.
5. Judging whether a statement is specific enough.
6. Judging whether a statement is actually the application of a certain principle.

7. Judging whether an observation statement is reliable.
8. Judging whether an inductive conclusion is warranted.
9. Judging whether the problem has been identified.
10. Judging whether something is an assumption.
11. Judging whether a definition is adequate.
12. Judging whether a statement made by an alleged authority is adequate.

As you can see, this approach is primarily passive. That is, we wait until someone else has said something and then we judge what has been said. Such an approach has only limited use in the writing class, where one has to produce statements, not just judge them. In other words, writing is active, not passive. It's only after you have written that it might be helpful to judge what you have done.

A second problem with critical thinking as it is often applied in English classes is that it proceeds on what is probably a false premise about the causes of what appears to be bad thinking. That is, we look at a paper that appears to be illogical, and we jump to the conclusion that the cause is bad logic on the part of the writer. From there it takes only one more leap of faith to conclude that we ought to teach logic to this poor thinker. Such a line of reasoning is akin to the justification usually given for teaching grammar: We look at a piece of writing that appears to be ungrammatical, conclude that the cause is lack of knowledge about grammar in the student writer, and decide that we therefore ought to teach some grammar. As you already know, this direct assault on grammatical problems doesn't work and is a waste of time. The same is true for the teaching of logic. Just as there is a long line of research showing

the futility of improving writing by teaching grammar, so there is a similar line showing that improving logic by teaching logic is probably the least effective way to go about it. The case approach, if properly used, will do the job much more quickly and effectively.

Now for one final bit of background material. Those of you who are familiar with discourse theory may be wondering which of the so-called aims of discourse I'm talking about. Let us briefly review the aims as outlined by the most popular theory of discourse, James Kinneavy's:

1. Expressive
2. Persuasive
3. Literary
4. Referential
    A. Informative
    B. Scientific
    C. Exploratory

When I say that I'm talking about academic writing, that means that I'm referring to <u>referential discourse</u>, which some people call <u>expository discourse</u>. All three of the referential aims--informative, scientific, and exploratory--involve critical thinking of some kind, but today I'm just talking about scientific discourse, that is, the kind of discourse which attempts to prove a thesis in a rigorously logical manner. Furthermore, while the case approach could be used with various types of scientific problems, I am today going to concentrate on those problems that primarily use deductive logic. I know that many people do not associate science with deductive logic, but Kinneavy does, and I think he's right. In any

case, that's where I am today: The case approach to scientific discourse which primarily uses deductive logic. Just let me remind you, in accordance with what I said earlier, that this method does not require you to teach a single bit of deductive logic. It does hlep if a teacher knows something about deduction because understanding what one is doing, and grading the papers, will then be easier. However, it isn't absolutely necessary.

Now, then, it's time to get into the main subject at hand. If you're going to teach deductive scientific argumentation but you're not going to teach deduction, what are you going to teach? The answer is this: You teach the contents of a deductive argument, not the rules of deduction. This comes in two parts. You teach students what the contents of a deductive paragraph ought to be, and you teach how to choose the right contents. You may also be tempted to teach students how to make the proper relationships among the various kinds of content, but I would urge caution about that. You will end up teaching logic to students who already have sufficient intuitive grasp of logic to handle the assignments. Even if some students don't have such a grasp, they will get it faster through trial and error in writing assignments than through learning formal logic.

Another way of putting this is to say that you will be teaching about truth, not form. Logicians, you may be aware, are more concerned about the proper form of an argument than its reference to truth. Once you have a few true statements, the logician can, if necessary, show you how to put them together to derive more true statements. However, most adults don't need such instruction. For anyone over about 16 years old--and that includes our writing students--the concern is how to gather the necessary

contents for an argument. Our intuitive grasp of logic is then usually sufficient to help us put them together correctly.

What, then, do the contents of a deductive argument consist of? Well, there are three basic kinds of content:

1. Evidence - facts about the particular subject of the argument.
2. Rules of Interpretation - rules, laws, principles, or generalizations to help us make sense of the facts.
3. Definitions - meanings of terms in the rule which will help us select the right facts about the subject.

The general principle, then, is that if a writer combines these three elements in the proper manner, the writer will have created a sound deductive argument. It sounds simple, and in some ways it <u>is</u> simple. However, students find it difficult to write this kind of prose, and teachers find this sort of writing difficult to teach. Let us approach the solution to these difficulties by starting with a legal case, since this case approach is primarily borrowed from techniques used in law courses. Here, for example, is an assignment in legal writing from the most popular book on legal writing, the one by Brand and White:

> Jim Baker, a seventeen-year-old, five-foot-nine, 139-pound boy, was hitchhiking one afternoon in July. Tom Abba, a heavyset, thirty-five-year-old man, stopped to give him a lift. While driving together, Tom learned that Jim was carrying five thousand dollars to make a grass pickup. Tom stopped the car and suggested that Jim get out, so they both could go for a swim. Both men left the car. Tom pulled a knife and said, "Jim, give me the money." Then Tom said, "I guess I can't leave a witness," and proceeded toward Jim. Jim drew a pistol from under his shirt and fatally shot Tom. Jim has been charged with murder.
>
> Assume that the following rules were in effect in this jurisdiction.
>
> 1. If a person is threatened with deadly force, he has a duty to retreat before employing self-defense.

2. There is no duty to retreat where one cannot do so in safety.

3. If a person kills another in self-defense he is not guilty of murder.

Discuss whether Jim is guilty of murder under these facts.

Norman Brand and John O. White, Legal Writing: The Strategy of Persuasion (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 150.

You can see that this clearly has two of the three elements that I listed. That is, the description of what happened constitutes the evidence that the writer must work with, and the "rules in effect in this jurisdiction" constitute the rules of interpretation which the writer must apply to the evidence. What about definitions? Well, they are the keys to the problem because the writer must define certain "key terms" in the rules in order to decide whether Jim is guilty. That is, whether Jim is guilty depends on the definition of "self-defense" and I suppose we would define self-defense in this case as "deadly force used when one cannot retreat in safety." However, that doesn't help much unless we know what it means to be able to "retreat in safety." If Jim could have retreated in safety, he is guilty of murder; if not, he is innocent. The evidence will, in fact, support either conclusion depending on how you define the term.

This case thus illustrates what I said earlier about evidence, rules of interpretation, and definitions being the keys to the contents of a deductive argument. We need the evidence to determine Jim's chances of having been able to retreat, a definition to determine whether his chances of retreat constitute having been able to retreat in safety, and the rules of interpretation to tell us whether, on the basis of the evidence and definition, Jim is guilty of murder. And a writer who makes sure that he

or she puts all three kinds of material into the argument for Jim's guilt or innocence has the makings of a good deductive paragraph--though, as I shall point out later, there is a bit more to it than that.

I am suggesting, then, that this same case approach involving evidence, rules, and definitions can be applied to virtually any introductory course in college in almost exactly the same manner. The basic approach is to give students a body of information about a case, either fictional or real, and tell the student to "interpret" the evidence on the basis of the contents of the textbook. The approach is possible because most good introductory textbooks concentrate on presenting the basic definitions of terms and rules of interpretation for a particular discipline. Indeed, it is possible to find textbooks that do nothing else but this. Another way of putting it is that while students expect to get "information" from textbooks, they do not--not if one defines "information" as factual material. Factual material may be given to illustrate the definitions and rules of interpretation, but in most courses it is not given as something to be learned. What a textbook really offers to be learned are concepts, and concepts involve definitions and rules. Cases, then, give students a way to apply the rules and definitions in practical situations.

To see how this works, let us look at the following case that I wrote for a sociology course (p. 4).* It applies to a particular chapter of the sociology textbook involving the concept of deviance, as deviance is defined by sociologists.

---

*This page number, and others to follow, refers to a handout included at the end of this paper.

You can see that the assignment begins with evidence, i.e., information about the situation of a young man named John White. The evidence is followed by the assignment at the bottom, which requires the student to interpret the evidence in light of the chapter on deviance. In effect, the assignment asks the student to choose a rule of interpretation from the four possible rules that are given in the chapter. That is, John White's deviance may be explained as a case of learned deviance, differential association, incomplete socialization, or anomie. And of course in order to decide which explanation is best, the writer has to know and be able to define not only the terms above which would occur in the rules of interpretation but also some more general terms. That is, the student has to see that John White is a deviant, as deviance is defined in sociology, that furthermore he is a "secondary deviant" and a "group deviant." Finally, the assignment also hints at the organization of the paper to be written; it is, according to the directions, supposed to be a paper of counterargument and rebuttal. In other words, the student not only has to prove his or her own case but also must prove that the other possible rules do not apply as well as the chosen one. The writer must therefore discriminate very carefully among the four rules, explaining them so that the differences, especially the differences relevant to this case, become clear. If the differences are not clear to the writer when he or she begins to write (and that's a normal situation), they will become clear as the writing progresses. Indeed, that is the purpose of this type of assignment--to enable students to learn textbook material in more than the usual depth by working with it in a practical situation. If the student only reads the material passively and does nothing active with

it, it is possible or even probable for the student to end up with the "mind full of mush" which Professor Kingsfield so eloquently denounces.

Beyond this very basic approach, where the appropriate rules and definitions are all clearly given in the textbook, there are several types of assignments on a higher level of difficulty. For example, Assignment II for the sociology of deviance (p. 5) is more difficult because only one clear rule of interpretation is given in the chapter. Students would have to provide alternate rules from previous chapters or from popular beliefs. In fact, the teacher would probably mention, and demolish, the popular beliefs in class. Thus it helps if the student has gone to class.

A third level, still a bit more difficult yet, can be seen in Assignment III for the sociology of deviance (p. 6). Here the students must write their own cases by finding real-life cases of deviance reported in the popular media. If necessary, students must also do a bit of library research to learn more about the case and to iron out conflicting accounts. Finally, the students must figure out for themselves which part of the chapter on deviance applies to their cases. Since the teacher has no control over the evidence in such real cases, any part of the textbook might apply. For example, the case might involve arguments over whether the person in question is in fact deviant, what kind of deviance it is, why it occurred, methods of collecting statistics on deviance, or anything else covered in the chapter.

Assignments like these can be written for virtually any course, especially an introductory course. I have included several examples, one from hospitality management (p. 7), one for cultural anthropology

(p. 8), and another from political science (p. 9). As you can see, they all are tied to specific chapters of specific textbooks which are noted somewhere on the page. I do not recommend, however, that any of you run home and try to get your colleagues in other disciplines to use these assignments. Not only may your colleagues be using different textbooks, but the assignments were written by an English teacher with no special training in these disciplines. They are intended as examples only, not as tested and workable assignments.

This brings us, finally, to the role of the English teacher in case writing of this type. We can, as I have shown, help teachers of other disciplines learn to write and use cases; the basic method is to borrow a colleague's textbook, read a chapter, and write a sample case to show that it can be done. If necessary, I also write a sample paper for the assignment to show my colleagues what the paper would look like and how to grade them (p. 12). All of this is made easier if your college has a writing-across-the-curriculum program but is still possible even without such a formal program.

A more important question for the English teacher, however, is whether we should teach case writing of this sort in the composition class. I think we can and should, as long as we realize that this is not suitable for remedial students who have more basic matters to attend to. It's most suitable for the second semester of a "regular-level" writing course.

For the subject matter in a writing class, I suggest ethics since ethics is the one academic subject that all students should have an adequate grasp of just by having been raised as normal people in our

society. It may be a layman's view of ethics, but that's all right; most of us English teachers have only a layman's knowledge of ethics, too. You can see an example of an assignment for ethics in your handout (p. 11). It proceeds in much the same way as the academic assignments but is a bit more difficult because there is no textbook on ethics to refer to for the relevant definitions and rules of interpretation. I do give students a brief handout discussing some of the basic ethical rules, but students don't really need it. With some practice, they are able to come up with the necessary material on their own.

The composition teacher would then proceed in much the same way as I recommend for teachers of other disciplines--teaching students that the argument must contain evidence, definitions, and rules of interpretation. The basic difference is that I take a full month on this unit whereas I doubt that teachers of other disciplines could take that much time. In that month, I go through several steps to help students learn to write case essays. First, I give them a specified outline to be followed (p. 15). This reduces the need for students' coming up with their own outline and allows them to concentrate just on the argument. The counterargument/rebuttal format also prevents any particular line of argument from getting so long that the student loses track of his or her logical connections. Each paragraph is, in effect, a single, self-contained deduction.

Second, I introduce some sort of heuristic procedure to help students "think up' arguments. The best method is to have students engage in oral debate about their cases, but that takes so much time that I generally use something else.

Third, I give students plenty of model essays to read and discuss. Some of these are professionally written, but most are student essays from past semesters. I also write several essays on transparencies to show a "model" of the writing process.

Fourth, I provide lots of practice. Students write two ungraded essays before trying one for a grade. Thus by the time they get to their fourth and final essay, their major grade for the unit, they have written at least three previous essays--probably more, since the usual practice is to write several drafts of each essay.

Fifth, taking a month on the unit allows me to go from easy to hard assignments, beginning with fictional cases which involve issues close to students' experiences, then to fictional cases of a more "remote" nature, and finally ending with real-life cases that the students must find for themselves. The fictional cases give me some control over content and students a limited body of facts to work with. The "real" cases are a bit harder, as I said earlier, because students must pin down the facts for themselves.

Finally, I provide all sorts of handouts and exercises. One handout is a plan sheet for essays that follows the required outline. One exercise is a sort of test of students' ability to read cases and discuss what is going on at various places in the essay. This reading is important, I think, because students may never have read arguments like these before. Reading and writing abilities, as you know, ought to proceed together as much as possible, one enhancing the other.

That is the basic procedure for teaching the case approach in a composition class. It can be done by composition teachers, though it

may take two or three years to learn how. I have been doing it for nearly ten years now, and so have other writing teachers at my school. However, if you try it, a number of additional considerations, beyond the ones mentioned above, will certainly come up.

The first may be the role of students' personal knowledge in writing the cases. To what extent will it be a factor? Well, you will try to write cases so that the need for personal knowledge is limited, but it is impossible to keep it out altogether. There's nothing you can do about that, and I'm not sure it's bad. Your older students will have an advantage because they have more personal knowledge to go on, but age should have some advantages. The older I get, the more convinced of that I become.

Secondly, some students and colleagues may note that some textbooks, especially in the technical and vocational areas, contain case assignments of their own. How similar are such cases to the appraoch that I have outlined here? I have examined a number of textbook cases and find that they seldom lend themselves to good writing assignments as presently written. Not surprisingly, textbooks for technical courses are intended to give students practice in using "techniques." These techniques are generally methods of acquiring data (interviews and surveys, for example) or methods of simplifying data through quantification or some other method. To turn such cases into writing assignments, one needs to supply additional directions requiring students to then "explain" the data by means of definitions and rules of interpretation.

Third, a teacher who uses the case approach will quickly find that a deductive paragraph contains a lot more than definitions, rules, and evidence. What is this stuff? In reality, what you will be seeing are

additional deductions, but you're better off not to explain it to students that way. Explain instead that sometimes one or more parts of the argument will need "backings," i.e., additional support or defense. For example, you may have to explain why you have defined a term a certain way, or you may want to cite the dictionary you obtained the definition from as proof that it's an accurate definition. Backings, thus, are best explained as supplements to the core of definition, rule and evidence than as the additional deductions which they really are.

Therefore, you may want to give your students an expanded list of contents for their paragraphs. In addition to the definitions, rules of interpretation and evidence from the case, the paragraph may also contain evidence from personal experience and various kinds of backings. And in some cases evidence will be missing and the writer will have to make a reasonable guess as to what it is, so there may also be "assumed evidence" in the paragraph. In fact, there are all sorts of complexities like these that will come up in class, so you will have to decide when to explain and when to leave such matters to the students' intuitions. The general rule, you will find, is that the more you can leave to intuition, the better. Students' intuitions are pretty good to begin with, get better as they read some model essays, and easily become confused if you overexplain what is going on.

If you do decide to explain, you may be tempted to explain in terms of formal logic--syllogisms, middle terms, and all of that. I strongly suggest that you stay away from formal logic since most English teachers are not qualified in logic and students rapidly become confused by it. If you must use logic, explain it with the Toulmin logic diagram instead

of with formal logic, adapting the diagram to however much you wish students to know. In my opinion, the Toulmin method is far better in a composition class than any other method.

Finally, you may wonder how much to tell teachers of other disciplines if they decide to use the case approach. Again, I suggest that you avoid overloading them with theoretical explanations as much as possible. Give them the basic approach--definition, rules, evidence--and a few teaching tips, and let it go at that. A sample of what I give to colleagues is in your handout (pp. 14-17). There's only so much of this method that benefits by advanced training. Most you have to learn by doing it. Besides, some of your colleagues have undoubtedly already developed their own case method. In these cases, there is no need to try to convert them to the case approach as I have outlined it here. A few teaching tips and a lot of sympathy will be sufficient.

Let me close, now, with a brief discussion of the disadvantages and advantages of using the case approach. There are three main disadvantages, or at least problems, with the case approach. One is that students, at first, find the case approach very difficult; they are being asked to deal with ambiguity--the fact that the "truth" may differ depending on what perspective one looks at the evidence from--and they are being asked to work deductively, which some of them, particularly the younger ones, are not very good at. Secondly, the students' frustrations tend to make life miserable for teachers--students can do that, you know--and furthermore teachers are faced with a lot of papers to grade, written in a mode that most teachers have little experience with. Finally, you do not find, in the popular media, examples of readable deductive scientific discourse to

offer as proof to students that real people write this type of discourse in practical situations.

These difficulties are undeniable, but theories of such people as Perry, Piaget, and Kohlberg indicate that students are ready for ambiguity and deduction and will learn to deal with it in college if given the appropriate experiences. Using the case approach, then, ensures that students will receive the necessary experience to achieve these important college goals. Secondly, I would suggest that two-year colleges, which rely far more than do universities on fully professional teachers to staff introductory courses, are better equipped to introduce the case approach than are other types of schools. I would not, for example, expect graduate students to teach it. And thirdly, I suspect that people outside the academy do use scientific deductive argumentation, primarily in internal memos within companies and other institutions. It may be unfortunate that we cannot supply such memos to our students, but if I am right we are providing students who aim for professional careers with experience in a skill that will be important to their professional advancement, whether they know it or not.

And whether or not I am right about the prevalence of these skills, the professionalism of two-year college teachers, and the rest need not, in the end, be the controlling factor as to whether one should use the case approach in one's own institution. The opportunity to give students experience in applying textbook knowledge, the enhancement of skills in critical thinking, and the cooperation that the case approach can engender among teachers of various disciplines are all powerful reasons to do it anyway.

In short, if something is worth doing on academic grounds, the fact that it is difficult to do should not hold us back. The case approach to academic writing may be difficult to do, but if you try it, I'm confident that you will find the results well worth the effort.

REFERENCES

KINNEAVY'S THEORY OF THE AIMS

Kinneavy, James L. A Theory of Discourse. New York. W.W. Norton, 1980 - originally published by Prentice-Hall, 1971.

McCleary, William J. "An 'Aims of Discourse' Program for Freshman English." ERIC ED 210 687.

Kinneavy, James L., William McCleary, and Neil Nakadate. Writing in the Liberal Arts Tradition (tentative title). New York: Harper & Row, forthcoming.

TOULMIN'S LOGIC DIAGRAM

Toulmin, Stephen. The Uses of Argument. Cambridge, G.B.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1958.

Toulmin, Stephen, Richard Rieke, and Allan Janik. An Introduction to Reasoning. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1979.

CRITICAL THINKING

Ennis, Robert H. "The Concept of Critical Thinking." Harvard Educational Review, 32 (Winter 1962), 81-111.

LEGAL WRITING

Brand, Norman, and John O. White. Legal Writing: The Strategy of Persuasion. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.

ETHICS AND THE WRITING CLASS

McCleary, William J. "Writing about Ethics: An Alternative to Legal Writing." Freshman English News, 10 (Spring 1981), 16-17.

(4)

WRITING ASSIGNMENT I: SOCIOLOGY

THE SITUATION:

You are the supervisor of several stockboys and discover that one of them, John White, has been regularly stealing stock, especially small but expensive items like cameras, records, and pocket calculators. Upon looking into John's background, you discover the following facts:

1. John lives with his mother; his father disappeared when he was a baby.

2. John's mother works full-time, not getting home till after 6 P.M.

3. John is part of a gang that calls itself the Green Hornets. The gang members have frequently been arrested for petty crimes such as shoplifting.

4. John is frequently absent from school. Indeed, he has seldom in all his school years attended more than half of the required school days.

5. John is 16 years old.

6. John likes athletics, participates in them frequently, and has a muscular build. John's basketball coach says that John is cooperative and eager but has a tendency to shoot when out of position or off balance and to foul too often when trying to steal the ball.

7. John's mother earns a good salary and provides a solid, middle-class lifestyle. His room is filled with gadgets which she has bought for him, and she also gives him spending money.

THE ASSIGNMENT:

Explain why, according to the sociology of deviant behavior, John steals items from stock. Whatever your explanation is, also explain why you would not accept other explanations as being more probable than your own.

Based on Chapter 10, "Deviant Behavior," Introduction to Sociology, by Bruce J. Cohen. Schaum's Outline Series (McGraw-Hill, 1979).

(S)

WRITING ASSIGNMENT II: SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE

THE SITUATION:

Sam Brown is a 23-year-old man who has been apprehended, tried, convicted, and sentenced for burglary. He served two years in prison and upon his release tried to adopt a normal life. However, he could not get anything but menial jobs nor could he get dates with the girls he used to associate with before going to prison. After nearly a year of attempting the straight life, he began committing burglaries again. Some additional facts about Sam are as follows:

1. Before being caught, Sam had committed just two burglaries, both rather minor affairs in which he broke into social clubs to steal alcoholic beverages. He was caught inside a social club on his third burglary. It seems that he had stopped to drink some of the booze and had passed out.

2. Sam lives in a state where one may not legally buy or drink alcoholic beverages until the age of 21.

3. Sam had been a "fair" high school student, had successfully graduated, and had gotten a job in a large company where there was plenty of opportunity for training and advancement. He lost this job when he went to prison and has not been able to find another one like it.

4. Sam's family was intact and still is. His father is a maintenance worker for the local school system, and his mother works at the same place as a cook in the school cafeteria. Sam has two brothers, both of whom graduated from high school, got married, and hold steady and responsible jobs.

5. Sam still keeps a menial job, but he makes most of his income through burglaries, about one burglary per week. He steals cash when he can find it but mostly relies on stealing and fencing valuable items.

6. Sam still sees two of his best friends from high school occasionally, but most of his current associates are ex-cons and petty criminals.

THE ASSIGNMENT

Explain why, according to the sociology of deviant behavior, Sam is behaving so differently from his former pattern before he went to prison. Whatever your explanation is, also explain why you would not accept other explanations as being more probable than your own.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT III: SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE

THE SITUATION:

Most examples of deviance in a society are minor or are so sketchily reported that the average citizen cannot make a safe judgment about why the deviance occurred. However, occasionally an example assumes major importance, and the media not only cover the deviant act but also delve more deeply into the person's background, thus providing us with information for making some reasonable inferences about the sociological explanation of the person's actions.

THE ASSIGNMENT:

Choose a well-known example of deviance, either of a single person or a group of persons, research the background of the person or group, and then write a paper explaining why, according to the sociology of deviance, the deviance occurred. Also discuss alternate explanations and why you do not accept them.

Additional Requirements:

1. This must be a current example, in the news at the present time. John Wilkes Booth will not do.

2. Avoid any subject that has been discussed in book-length form.

3. In gathering information about the person's background, rely on the best sources you can find. The National Enquirer is not appropriate, for example.

4. Use some reasonable method of letting the reader know your sources of information. If you are experienced in scholarly documentation (footnotes and bibliography), use that method, but if you are not, use a less-formal method. Concentrate on the main assignment, and avoid getting too "caught up" in the intricacies of documentation.

5. The following are some current examples of deviance. You may use one of them or find your own topic.

   a. The black Miss New York who became Miss America.

   b. Billy Cannon, former winner of the Heisman Trophy (for college football)

   c. Black Liberation Army (Kathy Boudine et al.)

   d. John Z. DeLorean, automobile magnate

   e. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Ambassador to the U.N.

   f. Don King, sports promoter

   g. Nuclear protesters at the Seneca Army Depot

(1)

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: INTRODUCTION TO HOSPITALITY

THE SITUATION:

Mr. and Mrs. James Miller own and manage a resort in the Adirondack Mountains. The resort presently consists of 15 cabins on Fourth Lake. There is room for adding 5 more cabins on their present land but very little possibility of expanding beyond that without acquiring more land, a remote possibility given the location. Other information about the resort is as follows:

1. The cabins are all equipped with kitchenettes, and thus guests are expected to bring and prepare their own food.

2. Occupancy is total in July and August, 3/4 in June, 1/2 in May and September. The resort remains open during the winter to cater to snowmobilers, skiers, and ice fishermen, but occupancy is almost totally controlled by the weather. During the cold winters with plenty of snow, occupancy may be total now and then, but this is rare.

3. There is virtually no possibility of raising rates, except to compensate for inflation, because of competition from other resorts. Like other resorts, rates are highest in July and August but only about 2/3 of that in other months.

4. The Millers do most of the routine work themselves. They hire skilled workers from Old Forge for major repairs and heavy work the Millers themselves cannot handle. On Saturdays from May through September, they hire teenagers to help in cleaning the cabins. (The cabins rent by the week, especially in July and August, and Saturday is the day when campers leave and arrive. Shorter stays are allowed in the off season, but the Millers handle additional cleaning required by this themselves.)

5. Each year, the Millers receive more requests for reservations (about 10 to 15) than they can handle during July and August. Occasionally this happens during good winters.

6. The Millers are in their late forties and expect to operate the resort as long as they possibly can. They like it and do not intend to retire at any particular date. As Mr. Miller says, "What am I going to do if I retire? Sit around and twiddle my thumbs?"

THE ASSIGNMENT:

As the Millers plan the future of the resort, one obvious part of the plan could be the addition of the 5 cabins. Write a paper in which

(7A)

you advise the Millers which of the four objectives of planning (p. 157) should be uppermost in their minds when they make their decision about expanding the resort. Also explain why the other three objectives would be less important in this case. Feel free to use your knowledge about the Adirondacks, resort operation in general, and other facts from outside the textbook in writing your paper. (In fact, if you know nothing about these factors, some preliminary research in the library might be useful.)

Based on Chapter 10, "Marketing and Sales Management," Principles and Practice of Management in the Hospitality Industry, by James R. Keiser (Boston: CBI Publishing, 1979).

(8)

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

THE SITUATION:

The Nyacks are a people who live on a large, semi-tropical island. During the dry season, they live along the shore, primarily eating seafood and fruit. The men go out fishing in small canoes, one or two to a canoe, while the women gather clams, mussels, and fruit. During the rainy season, when the weather is too stormy for fishing, the Nyacks move into the interior and live by farming and hunting. The soil is poor, so they must choose a different location for farming each year. Some additional information about the Nyacks is as follows:

1. Men are in short supply. Fishing in the ocean from a canoe is dangerous, as is hunting for wild boar in the interior.

2. Oceanside villages are semi-permanent, with families coming back to the same location every dry season. Interior villages are impermanent, lasting only one season.

3. Distances between oceanside and interior locations vary considerably, from ten to as far as fifty miles.

4. There is very little cooperation or contact among various groups of the Nyack. Some minor warfare takes place in the interior, as groups vie for suitable places to farm. And some minor raiding takes place in both dry and rainy seasons, as men try to obtain wives (to preserve the incest taboo). However, such contact as the groups have in peaceful ways is to purchase wives, the most common method of obtaining them.

5. Children primarily help the women in farming and gathering. Older girls tend the small herd of pigs which each group possesses, while older boys join the men in fishing and hunting as soon as they are able.

THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT:

Write an essay in which you identify the type of marriage that is most suitable for the Nyack. Choose from among monogamy, ploygyny, polyandry, and serial marriage. Defend your answer and also explain why you don't think that the alternative types of marriage would be appropriate.

Based on Chapter 8, "Marriage and the Family," Cultural Anthropology, 4th edition, by William A. Haviland (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston/CBS Publishing, 1983).

THREE ISLAND NATIONS

THE SITUATION

Three nations--Zarisia, Yoruba, and Xeforia--occupy a small island. Formerly the island had been controlled by a colonial power, but when independence occurred the three major ethnic groups on the island each demanded its own nation. After some warfare among the three groups, and with the help of the former colonial power, the groups staked out territory and became nations. Hostility among the groups had predated colonialism, was suppressed by the colonial power, rose again during warfare, and still simmers, although at a fairly low level. In spite of the remaining conflicts, however, all three nations have reduced their armed forces and have adopted several measures of economic cooperation. Other information on the three nations is as follows:

1. Zarisia is the only one of the three nations with substantial heavy industry, originally built by the colonial power. However, this industry is not suitable for arms production. All three nations import whatever arms and ammunition they need.

2. Although all three nations have some farming, Yoruba is primarily a nation of farmers. It has a few light industries and some small businesses. Yorubans who do not own farms or work in such businesses and industries as exist migrate to the other countries as "temporary workers."

3. Xeforia is mainly known for its natural resources: lumber, bauxite, some oil, fertilizer, and hydroelectric power.

4. Population: Zarisia, 3,500,000; Yoruba, 1,500,000; Xeforia, 2,225,000. Present size of military: Zarisia, 55,000; Yoruba, 40,000; Xeforia, 45,000.

5. Present economic agreements among the three countries are as follows: (a) no tarriffs on imports from each other; (b) each country to concentrate on its main strength; (c) Zarisia, with outside help, to aid Xeforia in building sawmills, refineries, smelters, and other facilities for exploitation of raw materials; (d) agreements to import food from Yoruba, but not so much as to harm local farmers.

6. All three countries are firmly aligned with the Western Powers (U.S. and allies), though only Zarisia is truly democratic. Yoruba is ruled by a hereditary chief, or king, Xeforia by a military oligarchy.

7. All three countries receive aid from the U.S. and other Western Powers. The Western Powers have strongly discouraged squabbling by threatening to withdraw aid from any country that attacks its neighbors.

8. The island on which the three countries are located is coveted by its nearest continental neighbor, Wefflia, a nation of about 10,000,000. Wefflia "owned" the island before colonial times. Zarisia, Yoruba, and Xeforia have agreed to a military alliance whereby they will come

to the aid of each other if Wefflia attacks. Wefflia is aligned with the Soviet Bloc.

THE ASSIGNMENT

There are several theories by which political scientists might explain the diminishing hostilities and rising cooperation among these three countries: nationalism, balance of power, regionalism, collective security, and bipolarity. Write a paper in which you identify and defend the theory that you think most strongly accounts for the improved relations. Also explain why the alternative theories, while perhaps partially true, do not account for the situation as well as the one you have chosen.

Based on Chapter 9, "World Politics," Government and Politics: An Introduction to Political Science, ed. by John C. Wahlke and Alex N. Dragnich (New York: Random House, 1966).

(11)

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: AN ETHICAL PROBLEM

DIRECTIONS:

A question of ethics is described below. Write a composition in which you take a position on this question and defend your position with a well-reasoned argument.

THE CASE:

John Q. is a recent high school graduate who wants to attend college. His parents agree to pay for his tuition and books and to let him live at home while he attends a nearby community college. John starts college but soon discovers that he has little interest in academic work. However, he enjoys the social life and he likes to participate in extracurricular activities. So he decides to "hang on" in college as long as he can. He passes a few courses with low grades but fails to pass about half of his courses. Is it ethical for John to continue in College in this manner?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (which may or may not be relevant):

1. John plays varsity soccer, writes a sports column for the student newspaper, and is elected to the student government. He works hard at these three activities.

2. John's parents don't ask direct questions about his grades, on the premise that he is now an adult and responsible for his own actions. When they ask indirect questions about his studies, John gives evasive answers without actually lying.

3. John's parents are reasonably well off financially. Paying John's expenses requires a few sacrifices but no major hardships for them.

4. As with most colleges, John's tuition covers about a third of the actual cost of college. The state pays the other 2/3 out of tax revenues.

5. The college does not give F grades so John cannot actually flunk out. However, if he doesn't pass enough courses, he will eventually not be permitted to re-enroll. John intends to continue enjoying college until this happens. He realizes that he will not graduate and that his grades will prevent him from transferring to another college.

6. John holds down a part-time job so that he can pay his own day-to-day expenses such as gasoline, lunches, dates, and car insurance.

7. As a result of college entrance exams, John was judged fully capable of college-level work by college officials.

(12)

THE CASE OF JOHN WHITE

At one time or another, nearly every person engages in behavior which, for better or for worse, deviates from the normal behavior which society expects. For example, a person may get drunk once in awhile or may perform a rare heroic act. Some people, however, go beyond this and adopt a recurrent pattern of abnormal behavior, and it then becomes important to determine why the person does so in cases where it is desirable to bring him back into conformity with society's norms. For example, if we expect to reform the habitual drunk driver, we need first of all to understand why the driver acts as he does.

This problem of recurrent deviant behavior arises in the case of John White, who has been discovered stealing from the stock where he works. John is a 16-year-old boy who has been raised by his mother, his father having disappeared when John was an infant. John frequently is absent from school but does like sports. His basketball coach says that John is friendly and cooperative but impulsive. John's mother works and is able to provide him with a middle-class lifestyle, giving him not only many possessions but also some spending money. However, John has joined a gang called the Green Hornets, and many gang members have been arrested for petty crimes.

The question to be addressed in this paper is why, according to theories offered by the sociology of deviant behavior, John has engaged in stealing from stock. I will take the position that he probably does it to be in conformity with his gang. Since other members of the gang steal, so does John.

The main reason I think this is that John's behavior and situation are best explained by the theory that deviant behavior is learned from one's associates. In this case we note that John's primary associates seem to be the gang members, and stealing is apparently normal behavior for the gang. In other words, the gang is a "deviant subculture," i.e., one that has rejected the norms of society; if one is to join a deviant subculture, one must adopt its norms. The sources from which John might have been led to follow normal behavior are less strong in his life. One parent is absent entirely, and the other is absent for much of each day. And John hardly attends enough school to have been solidly influenced by guidelines that he picked up there.

Of course, there are other sociological theories which might also be used to explain John's behavior. One such theory is that a person is deviant because he never had a chance to learn proper behavior. Thus, instead of learning deviant behavior from the gang, John could have developed this pattern early in life, sort of by accident, because he was never properly socialized. Some support for this interpretation can be found in John's absent father and his missing school, both important in the proper socialization of an individual.

While there is no way to prove definitely at what age and by what mechanism John picked up his deviant pattern, it does not seem likely to me that the pattern is simply a result of his never having had a chance to learn proper behavior. We can note that John plays sports, and it seems unlikely that he could be successful there if he was unable to follow rules and differentiate between abiding by rules and

breaking them. Furthermore, his coach has cited John's only problems with sports as being impulsiveness, trying too hard. In all other respects, John tries to be, and apparently is, cooperative. This does not seem to fit a pattern of deviant behavior. Furthermore, though his father is missing, he has always had a mother present to teach him the rules. It is true that she has to work and is often absent, but there were plenty of evenings and weekends while John was growing up during which she could have and probably did teach him proper behavior. Finally, we have no evidence that John was ever caught stealing in the past, which suggests that stealing is fairly recent behavior for him. Thus his stealing is better explained as newly-learned behavior--from the gang--than by improper socialization.

A second possible explanation for John's behavior is anomie, the idea that a person will deviate from the norm when deviation is the only way for a person to gain culturally-approved goals. This theory would argue that a person like John might deviate because he cannot acquire possessions or recognition which the culture would say he ought to have. The fact that John misses a lot of school, and is therefore probably not gaining scholastic success or recognition, would support the theory of anomie in John's case.

This hypothesis seems to have even less merit than the theory of improper socialization as an explanation for John's behavior. One goal in life is to acquire possessions, and the evidence here is that John's mother provides not only enough material wealth but also some spending money. Furthermore, John's job also ought to supply him with money. And as for recognition, John seems able to acquire that through sports if he so desires. It is probably true that John is not gaining scholastic success, but we have no evidence that scholastic success is important to him. In fact, by missing school he seems to indicate that it is not important.

In sum, then, the evidence as given for John's case seems to indicate a learned behavior rather than the result of improper socialization or anomie. It is possible, of course, that further information, if we had it, would change this interpretation. For example, if it could be shown that John was stealing before he joined the gang, that would support the theory that he had never learned proper behavior. Or if it could be shown that he ardently desired academic success but was unable to attain it, that might explain why he doesn't attend and would support the theory of anomie. But in the absence of such evidence, I am forced to conclude that stealing was learned from the gang.

(14)

THE CASE APPROACH TO ACADEMIC WRITING

INTRODUCTION

Whether or not a college has a program for writing across the curriculum, teachers of academic and technical courses often desire to give students writing assignments that will "engage" students with subject matter. There are many types of writing assignments available--term papers, reviews of the literature, lab reports, and so forth--but most of these, while valuable, do not engage students with the material specifically covered in the textbook. The case approach outlined below and exemplified in the attached assignments is one method of allowing students to apply the contents of the textbook. It is thus intended to supplement tests, whether multiple-choice or essay exams, as a method of helping students to learn what is in the book. Because of the time required to grade case essays, the case approach cannot replace tests, but it works better than tests to give students a taste of what it means to think like a professional in the field.

HOW THE CASE APPROACH WORKS

Most people think of the textbook as providing a body of "information" about a subject, but a close look at most introductory textbooks reveals that this information seldom consists of the factual material that the term might suggest. What it mainly consists of is "concepts" or "principles" which are comprised of definitions of key terms in the field and generalizations about various aspects of the field. I call these generalizations "rules of interpretation" because they allow professionals in the field to make sense of, or "explain," real-life factual situations that they may encounter.

The basic method of the case approach, then, is to give students a body of factual information, real or fictional, and ask them to explain it by using the definitions and rules of interpretation from their textbooks. This works best when there are three or four alternative ways of explaining the information and when there is no one right answer--although there may be, in the teacher's opinion, a "best" answer. In addition to the student's proving that he or she has chosen the best explanation, the student can also be required to prove that the alternative explanations are not the best.

A further refinement of the approach, if the teacher has time, is to use both fictional and real cases. Fictional cases can be used for practice and then the students can be assigned to find their own, real-life cases in newspaper or other media in order to write a paper for a grade.

ORGANIZING THE ESSAY

Cases are, initially, very difficult for many students, so it is highly desirable to eliminate one source of difficulty, the problem of how to

organize a case essay. This is done by providing students with a specified format, or organizational pattern, for their essays. The essay then becomes, in effect, a series of "slots" that must be filled and connected. Most teachers who use the case approach have, over the years, developed a pattern they want students to use. However, the attached cases are based on the assumption that students will use some variation of the following pattern:

I. Introduction

--The writer explains, for the unitiated reader, the "general issue" involved in cases of the kind to be discussed.

II. Summary of the Facts (optional)

--The writer summarizes the facts of the case. These are generally of two kinds: "basic facts" to let the reader know what happened, and "relevant facts" that will be crucial in the essay to come. (Good case assignments include some "irrelevant facts" to give students some experience in separating relevant from irrelevant.)

III. Controlling Paragraph

--The writer specifies the academic field (sociology, psychology, etc.) in which the argument will take place and the "specific issue" to be addressed (i.e., what he or she was assigned to do). Then comes the thesis statement--the writer's position on the case.

IV. Direct Argument

--The writer defends the thesis, specifying the rule of interpretation, definitions, and relevant facts. (This should take no more than one or two paragraphs.)

V. First Counterargument

--The writer explains an alternative position that someone might take on the case. This will generally be an alternative rule of interpretation, but it might also be a problem of definition or fact.

VI. Rebuttal to First Counterargument

--The writer explains why the first counterargument is not acceptable.

VII. Second Counterargument

VIII. Rebuttal to Second Counterargument

(The number of counterarguments and rebuttals is variable, depending on the assignment.)

IX. Conclusion

--The writer repeats the thesis and restates any "missing evidence" which might require a reconsideration of the case. (It is quite common for evidence to be missing and for the writer therefore to make reasonable assumptions about it in order for the argument to proceed.)

CASES IN TECHNICAL COURSES

Textbooks for technical courses such as business management sometimes include cases of their own. However, such cases may involve requiring students to practice "techniques" rather than to write papers. A "technique" in such assignments is usually a method of locating or simplifying information (i.e., facts or evidence) rather than applying the concepts covered in the book. If the teacher is to convert such cases into writing assignments, the directions in the textbook must be rewritten or supplemented to require students to interpret the information that was found or simplified. However, many cases in technical books are not suited to case writing assignments as explained here, so teachers may have to make up their own.

THE ATTACHED MATERIAL

The attached material consists of sample assignments from several courses: introduction to sociology, introduction to hospitality management, introduction to political science, and cultural anthropology. They are based on specific chapters of specific textbooks which are identified at the ends of the assignments. It should be noted, however, that they were written by an English teacher with no special expertise in any of these fields. Therefore, the assignments should be regarded only as examples and not as ready-made assignments which have been tested and found to work. Anyone wishing to use the case approach in his or her own classes will need to write new assignments based on the particular textbook being used and, it is hoped, on deeper insight into the field.

The only exception to the advice above is the assignment on ethics, which has been used in English classes and has been found to "work" as well as can be expected for a teacher with only a layman's knowledge of ethics. Ethics makes a good field to use in English classes because students can be expected to have a sound, if nontechnical, grasp of the basic definitions and rules of interpretation.

It should also be noted that there are <u>three</u> assignments dealing with the sociology of deviance. These are intended to exemplify three levels of sophistication. The first assignment simply requires the student to work with basic definitions of deviance and some rules of interpretation which are clearly specified in the textbook. For the second assignment, only one clear rule of interpretation is given in the book: the writer would have

to draw alternative explanations from previous chapters and personal knowledge. The third is an example of a "real-life" assignment which requires the student to find his or her own case by means of library research and to figure out which part of the chapter is relevant.

Finally, there is, for the first sociology case, an example of how the student might be expected to fulfill the assignment. This essay follows the outline given above.

CASE WRITING OUTSIDE THE ACADEMY

Some teachers may wonder if writers outside of college classes ever write essays like these case essays exemplified here. Most teachers probably realize that judges and lawyers do it--the case approach is based on legal writing--but does anyone else?

Well, I don't know for sure. I have done it, and I have seen it in memos written for internal use in the college. For example, a memo from the Dean defending ROTC courses used the counterargument/rebuttal format. I suspect, in fact, that case-type essays are more comparable to the genre of memo-type arguments than to public discourse. If this is true, then students aiming for managerial or professional careers in any field should find this skill useful in certain circumstances.

Whether or not casewriting is useful outside the academy need not affect a teacher's decision to use the case approach. The case approach is useful for deeper learning than required by tests and for giving students the chance to think like professionals in the field, and that is enough justification for its use.

Furthermore, the case approach has other values in meeting general liberal arts goals. For example, many students come to college with an existing but underdeveloped skill in deductive logic. Cases force students to use deductive logic and thus help to develop that skill. Secondly, many of the younger students--the traditional 18-year-old freshmen--arrive at college unable to deal with the fact that there may be more than one way of interpreting a body of information. By giving students opportunities to deal with competing theories, the case approach helps them learn to deal with ambiguity and opens their minds to the many perspectives that exist in society.

A NOTE ON TEACHING

Casewriting is, at first, difficult for many students (and for teachers, too). It is important that teachers of introductory courses treat case-writing as a skill to be learned (by themselves as well as by students) than simply as another way to test knowledge. However much case essays resemble essay exams, many students who could be successful will fail without more help than is usually given for essay exams. Analyzing sample essays, collecting and commenting on preliminary drafts, writing demonstration essays in class, having students write "practice essays," and other such teaching techniques are vital to successful use of the case approach.